

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ASMARA 00009 051031Z

17

ACTION AF-06

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FM AMCONSUL ASMARA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3757

AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

INFO AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON

COMNAVTELCOM WASHDC

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN

COMIDEASTFOR

NAVCOMMUNIT ASMARA

NAVCOMMSTA NEA MAKRI

CNO WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 0009

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS ET

SUBJECT: GETACHEW'S NEW INITIATIVE IN ERITREA

1. MEETING WAS HELD IN MAIN AUDITORIUM OF MUNICIPALITY OF ASMARA ON DECEMBER 27, PRESIDED OVER BY EPMG MILITARY AUTHORITIES WHO WERE ATTEMPTING TO CONVINCe PROMINENT LEADERS OF HAMASIEN DISTRICT THAT EPMG HAS BEST INTERESTS OF ERITREANS AT HEART. THIS MEETING WAS CONDUCTED JUST TWO DAYS AFTER COMPLETION OF APPARENT PUNITIVE OPERATION AGAINST HAMASIEN VILLAGES JUST WEST OF ASMARA. FURTHER INVESTIGATION INTO THESE PARADOXICAL EVENTS REVEALS THAT THIS MEETING IS PART OF LARGER INITIATIVE LAUNCHED BY BG GETACHEW, MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATOR, TO ISOLATE INSURGENTS FROM ERITREANS.

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PAGE 02 ASMARA 00009 051031Z

2. IN EARLY NOVEMBER, BG GETACHEW SELECTED 10 PROMINENT

LEADERS OF AKULE GUZAI DISTRICT, HIGHLAND AREA SOUTHEAST OF ASMARA, AND INSTRUCTED THEM TO VISIT MAJOR TOWNS IN DISTRICT CARRYING MESSAGE THAT AKULE GUZAI MUST AVOID DEVASTATION WHICH HAS BEFALLEN HAMASIEN. GIST OF MESSAGE WAS THAT PEOPLE OF AKULE GUZAI HAVE NOTHING TO GAIN BY THROWING IN THEIR LOT WITH INSURGENTS, AND CAN ONLY EXPECT TO BRING DEATH AND DESTRUCTION TO THEIR AREA. AFTER DELEGATION VISITED DECAMERE, ADI CAIEH, SENAFE AND OTHER TOWNS, TENSIONS IN THESE AREAS RELAXED SOMEWHAT AND FLOWS OF GOODS TO MARKETS IMPROVED.

3. ENCOURAGED BY THIS APPARENT SUCCESS, GETACHEW CALLED UPON GOVERNOR OF HAMASIEN TO ASSEMBLE SIMILAR GROUP OF NOTABLES WARNING THAT UNLESS LIKE EFFORT WAS SUCCESSFUL, HARSHER MEASURES AGAINST HAMASIEN WOULD BE TAKEN. GOVERNOR AND GETACHEW PREPARED SEPARATE LISTS FROM WHICH 25 LEADERS OF HAMASIEN, WERE SELECTED. THESE 25 SUGGESTED OTHERS WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN DEC. 27 CONCLAVE, HOWEVER, OF SEVERAL HUNDREDS INVITED, ONLY 120 ATTENDED (100 WERE FROM ASMARA ONLY 20 FROM VILLAGES). FOUR HOUR MEETING WAS PRESIDED OVER BY COL. BISHU, ERITREAN WHO COMMANDS TROOPS IN SERAE DISTRICT AND WHO HAS REPUTATION AS FIERCE FIGHTER, BUT EVEN-HANDED ADMINISTRATOR OF CIVILIANS, AND 25 SELECTED LEADERS. BISHU LED OFF PROCEEDINGS BY READING LETTER FROM GETACHEW IN WHICH HE A) REITERATED DETERMINATION WAS TO MAINTAIN UNITY AND INTEGRITY OF ETHIOPIA AND THIS WAS AT CORE OF CURRENT GATHERING, B) URGED PARTICIPANTS TO FORCE INSURGENTS TO AVOID VILLAGES AS THEY WILL ONLY CAUSE THEM TO BE DESTROYED, AND C) ADVISED VILLAGERS SHOULD NOT FLEE AT APPROACH OF EPMG FORCES, AS LATTERS CONCERN IS MERELY TO PROTECT THESE NON-COMBATANTS.

4. MEETING WITNESSED SEVERAL HEATED EXCHANGES AS HAMASIEN REPRESENTATIVES BLUNTLY REJECTED COL. BISHU'S CONTENTION THAT LOOTING OF VILLAGES AND ATROCITIES AGAINST CIVILIANS WAS RESULT OF "HEAT OF BATTLE", CONTENDING RATHER THAT SUCH ACTIONS ARE CARRIED OUT BY SUPPORT TROOPS WHO FOLLOW IN WAKE OF INFANTRY, AND THEREFORE, LOOTING, BURNING AND ATROCITIES MUST BE CONCERTED POLICY OF EPMG. SUCH EXCHANGES PRECLUDED ANY CONCRETE RESULTS, YET IT WAS AGREED THAT ANOTHER MEETING SHOULD BE HELD (NO DATE SET) AND THAT 25 LEADERS WOULD EVENTUALLY FORWARD RECOMMENDATIONS ON MEASURES TO IMPROVE EPMG-ERITREAN HOSTILITY TO GETACHEW.

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PAGE 03 ASMARA 00009 051031Z

5. COMMENT: SERIOUSNESS WITH WHICH GETACHEW VIEWS THIS INITIATIVE IS DIFFICULT TO ASSESS AS HE APPARENTLY HAD NO QUALMS ABOUT LAUNCHING LARGE PUNITIVE OPERATION IN COUNTRY WEST OF ASMARA (WITH ATTENDANT LOOTING AND BURNING), WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY PLANNING THIS MEETING WITH HAMASIEN LEADERS. THIS PARADOX MAY BE RESULT OF POOR TIMING OR DELIBERATE EFFORT TO REINFORCE URGENCY OF GROUPS DELIBERATIONS. IN ANY EVENT, IN HAMSIEN, DECISIONS MADE BY LEADERS FROM ASMARA WILL PROBABLY CARRY LITTLE

WEIGHT WITH RURAL PEOPLE, THUS WIDENING INCREASING SPLIT BETWEEN
RURAL AND URBAN ERITREANS.
WAUCHOPE

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